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SENSITIVE

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STATE FOR L, PM/PPA, EUR/CARC AND EUR/ACE

E.O. 12958: NA

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SUBJECT: Embassy Baku Concurrence on FY09 Requests for Section
1206-Funded Projects

¶1. (U) As required by the procedures to request Section 1206 funding for FY09, this message provides Chief of Mission concurrence for the projects by the U.S. European Command for Azerbaijan.

¶2. (SBU) Azerbaijan is an important partner in the war on terrorism, as evidenced by its continuing participation in Operation Enduring Freedom, and its past participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom and the peacekeeping operation in Kosovo. Moreover, Azerbaijan provides blanket overflight for U.S. aircraft transiting to Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as refueling at the commercial airport in Baku.

¶3. (SBU) One of the key U.S. interests here is the ability of Azerbaijan to continue to produce and export hydrocarbon resources from reserves located offshore in the Caspian Sea. In order to sustain this flow of energy, Azerbaijan requires maritime security forces capable of identifying and neutralizing threats at sea. In addition, the Caspian Sea is a potential corridor for WMD materials to Iran, and a route for narcotics moving from South/Central Asia to Russia and Europe. Consequently, the 2009 1206 proposals focus on providing increased capacity to the Azerbaijan Naval Commando Unit (Unit 641) and the ships that could potentially deliver them to a target. Post is not aware of any credible evidence of gross violations of human rights by Unit 641.

¶4. (U) The 2009 Azerbaijan proposals for 1206 funding consist of:

¶A. (SBU) Azerbaijan Naval Commando Unit Counter-terrorism training and equipment (estimated USD 4 million). As part of its NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan, Azerbaijan has pledged to increase the capability of its naval forces to interdict transnational threats on the Caspian Sea, and to assist in the fight against terrorism. Toward this end, the Ministry of Defense has worked closely with the United States Department of Defense for the past two years to increase the response capabilities of Azerbaijani navy divers and naval commandos as part of the Caspian Maritime Security program. Azerbaijani divers and naval commandos have received U.S. training, equipment, and familiarization on interdiction techniques against surface vessels suspected of carrying contraband on the Caspian Sea, as well as training to react to terrorist acts against energy infrastructure. The program intends to continue training with the Blackwater Corporation to sustain the Naval Commandos' current level of tactical skills with new entry training; develop their capability to conduct operational planning and command control; and develop the Azerbaijan Navy's capability to sustain the unit by developing its own program of New Entry Training. This program will also focus on close quarters battle training and explosive ordnance disposal training and

equipment. No lethal military equipment would be provided under this training program.

¶B. (U) Ship engine upgrade assessment (estimated USD 10,000). In order to be able to deter and respond to threats on the Caspian Sea, as well as deploy and employ the Azerbaijan Naval Commando Unit, the Navy must upgrade their ship capability for sustained operations on the Caspian Sea. This assessment will determine the current capability of the Naval ships and which areas need improvement.

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